

Hiram W. Sibley House
400 East Avenue
Rochester
Monroe County
New York

HABS No. NY-5648

HABS
NY,
28. ROCK,
22-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NY-5648

HIRAM W. SIBLEY HOUSE

NY,
28-ROCH, 22-

Location: 400 East Avenue, about 100 yards east of Alexander Street, Rochester, Monroe County, New York

Present Owner and Occupant: Mrs. Harper Sibley

Present Use: Private residence

Statement of Significance: As the home of Rochester's wealthiest man when it was constructed in 1868, the Hiram W. Sibley House stands today as an example of the use of residential architecture to illustrate and enhance the social position of a prominent member of the community. With the stylistic alterations (c. 1900), the family continued to use the current architectural mode exemplifying wealth and social prominence, as perceived in western New York at the turn of the century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1868.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: parts of lots 58 and 59 in the Second Division of Township #13, Seventh Range.

1867 Deed, October 13, 1867, Book 215, p. 168.
From: Belden R. McAlpine and wife.
To: Hiram Sibley.
For: \$36,000.00.

1887 Deed, July 21, 1887, Book 430, p. 189.
From: Hiram Sibley and Elizabeth M. Sibley, his wife.
To: Hiram Sibley.
For: \$1.00.

1911 Deed, June 3, 1911, Book 850, p. 445.
From: Hiram Sibley, by Execs. and Trustees.
To: Harper Sibley.
For: \$1.00.

1929 Deed, May 22, 1929, Book 1507, p. 262.
From: Harper Sibley.
To: Harper Sibley and Georgianna, his wife.
For: \$1.00.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown.
5. Original plans: None known.
6. Alterations and additions: The original Italianate house was altered c. 1890 to its present Federal Revival style with the removal of the bracketed porch, cupola, and conical brackets. The windows were reduced in scale and muntins inserted. Prior to this alteration, Sibley had designs for a new house in the Queen Anne Revival style drawn by James G. Cutler. An elevation was published in the Inland Architect and News Record, Vol. 14, Dec., 1889. The present east wing was constructed in 1912. The dormers were added after the cupola was removed.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Hiram Sibley, the owner of the original house, began working for a telegraph company operating under the House patent about 1850. He engineered the merger with Ezra Cornell's Morse Patent Company between 1854 and 1856. Thus was created the Western Union Company. Sibley attempted to lay an overland telegraphic cable to Europe via Alaska and Siberia, but with the completion of the Trans-Atlantic cable in 1866, Sibley stopped his work. Sibley's office as president of Western Union has been preserved in the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences. He then began building railroads and acquiring farmlands.

For forty years Sibley was active in Rochester civic affairs. In 1843, he was elected to a term as County Sheriff. In 1874, he built Sibley Hall for the University of Rochester. In 1876, he founded and endowed the Sibley College of Mechanical Arts at his business associate's new university, Cornell.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: An etching of the Italianate house appears in McIntosh, History of Monroe County, New York, 1877, plate IX.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deeds, Office of Monroe County Clerk.

b. Secondary and published sources:

McIntosh, Prof. W. H. History of Monroe County, New York. Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign and Everts, 1877.

McKelvey, Blake F. Rochester: The Water Power City, 1812-1854. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945.

"Residence for H. W. Sibley, Rochester, N. Y." Inland Architect and News Record. Vol. XIV, Dec., 1889.

3. Likely sources not yet investigated: Sibley family papers; Records of Western Union.

Prepared by Kevin Patrick Harrington
Society for the Preservation of Landmarks in
Western New York
February, 1967

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This Federal Revival style, based on New England prototypes of the early nineteenth century and consisting of enlarged and flattened details, gives the facade an imposing and monumental character.
2. Condition of fabric: The structure has received excellent maintenance.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: sixty feet by ninety-five feet including wing; three-bay facade plus four-bay wing; two-and-one-half stories; L-shaped plan.
2. Foundations: The elevated brick foundation is capped by a dressed stone water table.
3. Wall construction: The red brick of the wall surface has little grout and no headers, thus emphasizing the horizontal pattern of the brick. A two-stepped recessed panel accentuating the side bays of the main facade are closely framed by four two-story fluted and footed white Ionic pilasters.

4. Structural system: The brick walls are load supporting.
5. Chimneys: There are seven banded and corbeled red brick chimneys.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways: The main south entrance consists of elaborately traced sidelights and elliptical fan-light which frame an eight panel white wood door. This composition is framed by a prominent eared molding which is capped by a simple bracketed cornice supporting a decorative wrought iron balcony. The east side or porch entrance has top and sidelights.
 - b. Windows: The first floor windows of the main section consist of ten light double casements capped by a rectangular topleight. All other windows are double hung with six over six light sashes. All windows are finished with stone trapezoidal lintels containing a keystone and painted louvred shutters.
7. Roof: The low pitched hip roof has a seamed tin covering. The deep, molded entablature of the main section, with plain frieze topped by a row of dentils and block modillions, is pierced by rectangular openings containing the double nine light casement windows of the half story. The wing is finished with a simpler version of the same entablature. Two lighted shed dormers per side finish the roof of the main section.
8. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: The main south entrance is approached by a six step stair leading to the narrow unenclosed terrace which projects from the elevated foundation level. Low projecting brick piers topped by dressed stone slabs frame the stair. The flat roofed porch of the east entrance of the main section has three Doric columns supporting a three-part entablature. Four cement steps give access to this entrance.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The center entrance hall provides access to the office and "Treasure Room" to the west and the morning room to the east. The hall leads directly to the living room located in the northwest projecting

corner of the main section. The hall continues to the east providing access to the dining room and stairwell and the kitchen wing. The second floor contains five bedrooms and a "toile de Jouy." The servant quarters are above the kitchen.

2. Stairways: The two flight open stairwell is finished with turned balusters.
3. Flooring: Most floors are hardwood. There is some parquet flooring.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The dining room is finished with three-sectioned vertical panels elaborately framed and molded. The narrow three-sectioned cornice is topped by an egg and dart molding and finished at the paneled wall surface by a molding containing acanthus leaves. The parlors are finished similarly. The library is finished with two-sectioned vertical oak paneling and a summer beamed ceiling.
5. Doorways and doors: Most doors have six panels. There are sliding doors framed by an entablature between the parlors. Double doors topped by a broken pediment open into the library. Some of the first floor casement windows are French doors opening onto the narrow terrace.
6. Special decorative features, trim, cabinet work: Some fireplaces have marble surrounds framed by fluted wood piers, a decorative central panel with low relief garland and topped by a narrow mantel. The Tudor arched opening of the library fireplace is framed by an oak molding topped by an overhanging mantel with carved acanthus leaf design. The entire composition including the paneled overmantel is framed by fluted Doric pilasters. This central unit is flanked by open book shelves which surround small square stained glass windows depicting armorial bearings. The fireplace in the "toile de Jouy" room is finished with original Wedgewood panels.
7. Hardware: A door knob from the original Western Union office is on the door of the "Treasure Room."

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces south, set back from a main artery into the city. It is located within the City of Rochester's East Avenue Preservation District.

2. Historic landscape design: Dressed stone piers with stone caps and panels bearing Sibley's monogram flank the center entrance walk, providing an anchor point for a low dressed stone wall which is topped by a wrought iron fence. Rows of three trees flank the long walk.
3. Outbuildings: There is a brick two-car garage.
4. Walks: A brick herringbone patterned walk leads from the street to the main south entrance.

Prepared by: Jean Tisher and
Amy Hecker
Society For the
Preservation of
Landmarks in
Western New York
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project of twenty-six selections of historical and architecturally significant Rochester structures was under taken in 1966, by the Society for the Preservation of Landmarks in Western New York, Inc., Mrs. Patrick Harrington, Executive Director, in cooperation with the Historic American Buildings Survey, James C. Massey, Chief. The project was under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Senior Historian. Architectural and historical descriptions were contributed by the Society for the Preservation of Landmarks in Western New York, Inc. General photographic documentation was undertaken by Hans Padelt, Senior Engineer, Graflex, on a contractual basis with the Historic American Buildings Survey. The final documentation and editing was done by Susan R. Slade in 1978, for transmittal to the Library of Congress and the impending publication of the Historical American Buildings Survey New York State catalogue.